

# 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

## Islamism on the Internet

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Heinrich Fischer – Rheinische Druckerei GmbH

### As of March 2019

jugendschutz.net has a legal mandate and is the joint center at federal and state level for the protection of minors on the internet.



Federal Ministry for  
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,  
Women and Youth



### Funded by



Federal Ministry for  
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,  
Women and Youth

### as part of the federal programme

Demokratie **leben!**



Dear readers,

Today, many children and young people can no longer imagine their lives without Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. However, Islamists also take advantage of the popularity of social media and messaging services among young people. With this report, jugendschutz.net shows how they utilize these digital platforms to approach young users. Islamist actors consciously communicate like young people and offer a relationship of mutual trust pretending to understand the worries, fears and issues that relate to young people and to provide guidance. Approaching children and young people with real-life topics can easily encourage them to join in or further spread Islamist ideas.



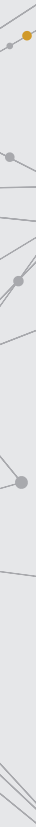
We have to ensure that children and young people can move around in the digital world as safely as in the real world. With the federal program „Live Democracy!“ the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs funds numerous initiatives aiming at building up young people’s digital literacy and making them aware of ideological content and associated risks. However, we also must call social media providers to account – it is up to them to use their community guidelines to set standards.

Here, jugendschutz.net does important work and provides substantial support. I would like to thank jugendschutz.net for working with us to enable children and young people to explore the digital world free of troubles. Together, we provide the skills for coping with extremist activities on the internet in order to prevent children and young people from being led astray by extremist ideology – also in the digital world.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dr. Franziska Giffey".

Dr. Franziska Giffey  
Federal Minister for Family, Senior Citizens and Youth



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## **DIMENSIONS AND TRENDS IN ISLAMIST PROPAGANDA**

Youth culture as a connecting factor for Islamist propaganda

#NichtOhneMeinKopftuch: Islamist participation campaign via Twitter

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# DIMEN SIONS AND TRENDS

Islamist online propaganda is disseminated in various forms. Sometimes in more subtle, sometimes in more explicit ways to win over children and young people to the extremist world view pursuing an approach tailored to their everyday lives and their media habits. Islamists take up questions and issues that young people are interested in. Children and young people can come across Islamist propaganda especially in popular social media services.

Additionally, Islamist groups link up with youth cultural phenomena and debates. This is how they reach a widest possible and specifically young audience. Islamist propaganda also often ties in with young people's strong sense of justice or their experiences with racism and discrimination. Especially when it comes to low-threshold propaganda, ongoing social debates on YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook play a major role. Here, they also promote campaigns and activities and encourage young people to join in and spread the Islamist narratives.

During the monitoring exercise, jugendschutz.net recorded less propaganda of the terrorist organization 'Islamic State' (IS) in German language than in the previous years. For example, the dissemination of IS execution videos has dropped significantly. Calls for joining the armed fight and carrying out attacks in Western societies are mostly spread on Telegram. Islamists also use images and videos to glorify Jihad on other social media platforms popular among young people staging Jihad as a heroic fight and the only true and 'God fearing' lifestyle.

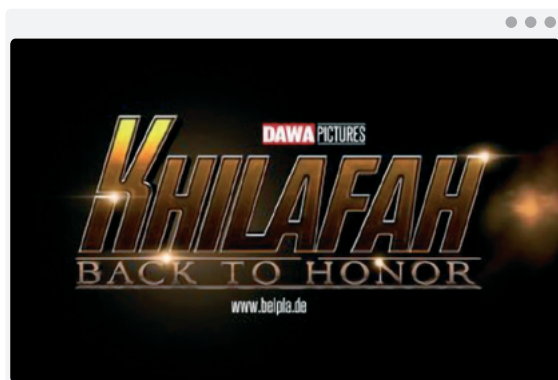
## **Youth culture as a connecting factor for Islamist propaganda**

Tying in with youth cultural phenomena is part of Islamist groups' propaganda strategy. They directly serve young people's viewing habits and pick them up in their immediate surrounding to promote their ideology.

The aim is to spread their content on many social media platforms to also reach those young users who haven't had any contact with extremist groups so far. In order for their propaganda to reach the largest audience possible, Islamist actors specifically take up ongoing debates, but also youth cultural phenomena. Linking to the everyday lives of young people shall create low-threshold access to the extremist world view.

This allows for an easy entry into the extremist scene.

The ideology's key elements can be visualized in a catchy way and spread quickly. The 'cool' design and provocative statements shall be appealing to young people and shall encourage them to share or like the content. Very often Islamists borrow elements from well-known comics, films and computer games. One example is the alienated logo of the successful and popular movie 'Marvel's The Avengers: Infinity War'. The logo's recognition factor shall make young people susceptible to the message. This is how an anti-democratic attitude is promoted 'by the way'.



Use of a distorted logo to promote the Caliphate.  
(Source: Telegram, belpa)



An example of how Islamists exploit events that attract much attention and conversation among a young target group online was the mixed martial arts (MMA) fight between Conor McGregor and Khabib Nurmagomedov. Here, the connecting factor for Islamist propaganda was that Nurmagomedov is a Muslim. In videos, it was all about the compatibility of Islam and MMA as well as the role Nurmagomedov's religion played for his victory. Combining these videos with pieces of extremist ideology is a subtle way of presenting them to persons interested in the event. This is how a video of a Salafist preacher received nearly 50,000 hits on YouTube and involved the promotion of further Salafist content on social media platforms and messaging services. Young people's attention was drawn to this content to indoctrinate them.



Salafists use Mixed-Martial-Art-Fights events to attract attention to their online content.

(Source: YouTube)

Another example is the public racism debate after football player Mesut Özil's decision to quit the German national team, which quickly went viral on social media. Islamists fueled the debate with real-life and emotional messages trying to tie in with experiences with discrimination specifically among young Muslims. They propagated an alliance of 'all Muslims' and, at the same time, the separation from the majority society. This is how Salafists and other Islamist actors aim at deepening social conflict lines. With questions concerning identity, affiliation, recognition and racism

they want to reach young people and convince them of their world view.



Debates about Mesut Özil: Islamists take up issues that touch young people emotionally.

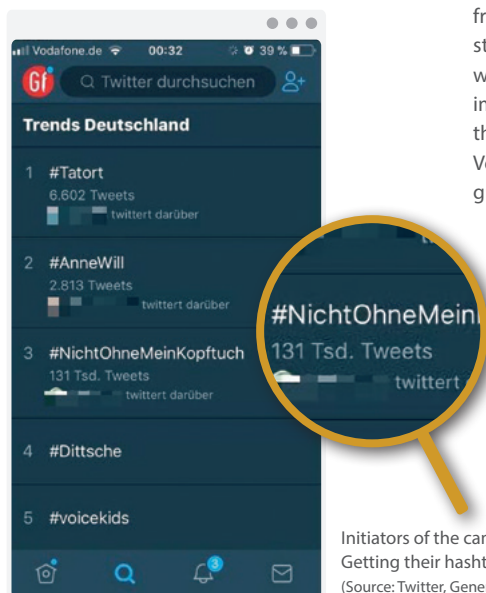
(Source: Facebook, Generation Islam)

## **#NichtOhneMeinKopftuch: Islamist participation campaign via Twitter**

In April 2018, the Islamist group 'Generation Islam' called for a 'Twitter storm' under the hashtag #NichtOhneMeinKopftuch i.e. 'not without my headscarf'. Under the guise of protesting against an alleged threat of a headscarf ban, Islamists used the hashtag to spread their messages. They specifically called on young people to take a stand against this ban on social networks. Many people also participated in the debate, among these

politicians and artists from the hip-hop scene. This increased the reach of their campaign. The hashtag eventually arrived in Twitter's trends becoming visible to a mass audience. Not only the initiators of the campaign, but also other Islamist actors picked up the discussion and spread propaganda.

They appealed to young people's sense of justice and their potential experiences of discrimination. Following a simple friend-enemy pattern they expanded their standard victim narrative. Many posts were well disguised and should give the impression that they are 'only' used to target the discrimination against Muslim women. Very often however, supporters of Islamist groups were behind these profiles helping the initiators to climb aboard trending topics and become Twitter trends.



Initiators of the campaign show their success:  
Getting their hashtags trending on Twitter.  
(Source: Twitter, Generation Islam; original not pixelated)

## After attacks: Islamists spread conspiracy theories

Again and again, Islamists use terror attacks to spread conspiracy theories and Islamist narratives. After the Strasbourg Christmas market attacker, an alleged IS 'soldier', had been shot in a gun battle with French police, many Islamist actors exploited the event to push their conspiracy theories through social media channels. According to them, the attack was 'orchestrated' to distract attention away from the 'yellow vest' protests in France and to portray Islam in a bad light.



Conspiracy theories on Islamist Facebook pages.  
(Source: Personal Facebook profile; original not pixelated)

*Creating  
distrust towards  
the rule  
of law.*

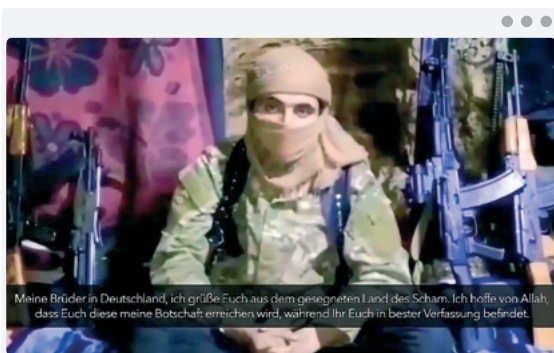
Subliminal propaganda messages fuel fears and distrust towards the rule of law and aim at turning away from democratic values. Numerous comments from users show that they are susceptible to such messages. This also reveals the attractiveness of conspiracy theories: They offer simple explanations for complex issues and are especially fascinating to young people.

## **Militant Jihad: Calls for violence focusing on specific target groups**

Islamists also adapt images and videos promoting 'armed struggle' according to the different target groups. Whenever they address girls and young women or boys and young men with their propaganda material, the persons depicted generally are women or men.

For example, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an al-Qaeda affiliate terror organization, posted a video on the messaging service Telegram subtitled in German language and specifically reached out to German users: The protagonist directly addresses the 'brothers in Germany'.

*'Brothers in Germany'  
are directly  
addressed.*



Jihadist explicitly calling on users living in Germany to join the militant struggle.

(Source: Telegram, insights into Sham)

He calls on them to join the terror organization in Syria to put an end to the suffering in Syria.

Descriptions of children killed and women raped in Syria shall create feelings of guilt and confirm the call. An appeal with an emotionalizing message and a call for action primarily aimed at young users.

For the first time, a propaganda film of the terror organization 'Islamic State' showed women in trenches holding assault rifles and fighting side by side with men. A 'call to arms' soundtrack explicitly calls on women to join militant Jihad. The female target group receives the message that the acts of violence they commit are legitimate and desirable in the name of IS. The role model of women otherwise portrayed as a housewife and mother was once again extended to one of a 'fighter': Girls and women shall actively engage in the fight.



The armed struggle as a desired goal in lives of girls and women.

(Source: Telegram; original not pixelated)



Women depicted as fighters, also, in order to motivate men for militant Jihad.

(Source: Telegram; Fii.Amanillah)

At the same time, Islamists challenged young men's sense of honor saying, that they instead of the women should take up arms and should protect them. Since the video was not published in German language, German-speaking Jihadist Telegram channels posted selected scenes from the clip in the form of images and comments. Prepared in such a way Islamist propaganda also addressed a young audience in Germany.

## **Islamism on Instagram: Militant Jihad as 'cool' lifestyle**

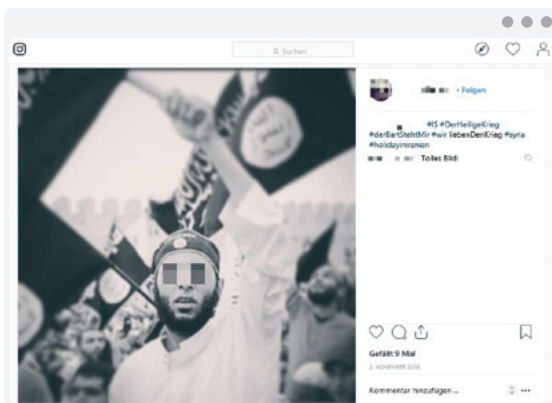
Instagram is one of the biggest and most popular social media platforms. It has become an everyday tool for youth culture communication specifically among young people in Germany. Here in particular, images and short videos are aesthetically staged, shared and liked. Islamists use Instagram and all its attractive features to spread their propaganda. They present seemingly innocuous, eye-catching images of everyday life or use popular hashtags to tie in with young users' viewing habits and browsing behavior.

*Hashtags lure users to  
Islamist profiles.*

This is how they try to attract them to Islamist profiles and introduce them to the ideology. There, for example, Islamists post images depicting Jihadists as heroic soldiers. This mix

between aestheticized images of everyday life and militancy shall communicate a 'cool' lifestyle.

Specifically problematic: Islamists take advantage of Instagram's explore page based on the individual past behavior. When searching for specific keywords the explore tab will automatically expose users to content they might like, including clearly extremist content. Next to subtle Islamist posts jugendschutz.net also recorded explicit Jihadist content.



#derBartStehtMir (i.e. the beard looks good on me): Jihadists use harmless hashtags to spread IS propaganda.  
(Source: Instagram; original not pixelated)

## Subtle and militant: Change of Islamist propaganda on Telegram

The messaging app Telegram has become one of the most important distribution channels for Islamist propaganda on the internet in recent years. With the death and the arrest of many Jihadists as well as the loss of territory and retreats in Syria and Iraq, online propaganda on Telegram has also changed over the year. A shift of Jihadist and Islamist propaganda from the non-militant spectrum can be observed.

Propaganda in German language posted by IS terror organization sympathizers has dropped. However, IS supporters increasingly called for continuing the fight 'at home' (i.e. the users' residence). In 2018, they also used Telegram to spread detailed instructions for a 'home battle', for example, on how to build bombs and carry out bomb attacks. Specifically young people are encouraged to pursue militant Jihad themselves. Al-Qaeda affiliate groups still push propaganda and campaign for joining terrorist organizations in Syria



Glorifying images shall promote solidarity with imprisoned Islamists.

(Source: Telegram, At Taqwa Media Center)

Next to apparent Jihadist propaganda, more subtle propaganda increasingly finds its way through the Telegram app; for example, calls in the style of a 'prisoner mission' for praying and donating for 'brothers and sisters in need'. This is how Islamists want to make sure that inmates and their relatives do not turn their backs even after the fall of the Islamic State.

In particular, this shall also keep up the image of a strong community with 'living martyrs' that young people are attracted to. The crimes of those 'wrongly imprisoned' by the enemy are thus in so many words said to be legitimate and just.

# ILLEGAL CONTENT AND ACTION TAKEN



Actions taken against Islamist content on the Internet aim at protecting children and young people from risks and disturbance as quickly as possible. This is why jugendschutz.net contacts providers and platform operators in Germany and abroad and calls on them to quickly remove content violating the laws.

In those cases where a person in Germany can be identified or where there are reasons for indexing (i.e. inclusion in the Federal Review Board's list of media harmful to minors), jugendschutz.net calls in the Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Media (KJM). Whenever there is an imminent danger situation, jugendschutz.net informs the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) to prevent danger to life.

The 2018 monitoring revealed a decrease in the number of illegal content. Even the operators of major platforms responded when put on notice of infringements and mostly removed these posts. However, the subtle and close to reality propaganda and the increasing presence in social media services specifically popular among a young audience is still a high potential of danger for children and young people. Almost all the relevant Islamist content can be found on popular social media platforms. This is why these platform operators are particularly important when it comes to protecting their young users.

## **Most propaganda in social media**

In 2018, jugendschutz.net checked around 19,200 internet sites containing Islamist content. Almost all cases were disseminated from internet servers abroad, the majority via social media services. The monitoring included around 17,500 individual contributions like posts and comments, 950 propaganda videos and 550 profiles with an Islamist background.

jugendschutz.net classified 649 cases as illegal with a total of 872 violations of youth protection laws (2017: 786, 1,547 violations). More than 85 % of the cases were identified during continuous monitoring. All other cases were linked to reports from partner organizations, youth protection organizations and complaints from users via jugendschutz.net's hotline

More than half of all illegal content (56 %) referred to the dissemination of symbols of unconstitutional organizations. 20 % concerned the glorification of war (e.g. glorification of militant Jihad) and 14 % concerned the violation of human dignity (e.g. depictions of suffering war victims). The percentage of graphic violence (e.g. videos depicting executions or torture) was still at 6 %, but dropped from 75 % compared to the previous years. This is because German-speaking IS propaganda has dropped during the year. This in turn has to do with the death or arrest of many Islamist actors and the terror organization's territorial loss.


In 82 % of all cases jugendschutz.net's direct communication with providers resulted in removal or blocking of the illegal content. In four cases jugendschutz.net called in the BKA. Only one other case revealed evidence of a German person responsible for the content and was forwarded to the KJM for further action. The low number of actionable cases shows that Islamist propaganda is posted anonymously. Whenever real names are used or persons can clearly be made responsible, they pay close attention to not become subject to legal action.

## Direct contact with providers usually leads to success

jugendschutz.net recorded 565 cases i.e. 87 % of all cases in social media. Much of the illegal content can still be found on YouTube (187, previous year: 203), Telegram (95, previous year: 68), and Facebook (65, previous year: 74). However, within the monitoring in 2018, Instagram also turned out to be a service Islamists use to spread their illegal content: jugendschutz.net documented 141 cases. This is particularly concerning since Instagram has become popular among more and more young people.

The contacts with global players jugendschutz.net could establish over the years now bear fruit – all services have increased their removal rate. YouTube removed 99 % of the content jugendschutz.net reported from the platform or blocked access for users in Germany (previous year: 92 %). On Instagram, contact with the parent company also resulted in removal or blocking of almost all illegal content (98 %). In terms of Facebook, jugendschutz.net achieved removal of 82 % of the infringements reported (previous year: 68 %).


Only the Russian service Telegram again proved to be a relatively safe haven for disseminating Jihadist content. In 2017, bad press partly based on jugendschutz.net's published research results lead to the removal of 85 % of all illegal content reported. In 2018, this rate dropped to 58 %. The management's insufficient awareness of the problem prevents the messenger from curtailing Islamist propaganda that cannot be allocated to the IS. Considering Telegram's growing popularity, politics and international partners must join efforts to explore all courses of action.



*Contact with  
global players most  
effective.*

## Better precaution by operators of popular social media services

The massive presence of Islamists in services specifically attractive to young people requires additional preventive protection measures by operators of popular services. Here, comprehensive terms of service covering all interaction risks are crucial. By doing so, operators set important standards and rules users must agree to abide and mark legal and ethical boundaries for disseminating content. All services checked for Islamism online prohibit the dissemination of hate speech, violence or illegal content; however, the radicalizing or brutalizing effects of harmful content endangering young people stopping well short of being legally assailable remains unconsidered.



*Easier reporting options.*

Easily accessible and easy to use reporting systems leading to quick removal of illegal content are key. YouTube, Facebook and Instagram provide easy reporting options, e.g. right below the videos; however, they are only for logged in users. Persons not registered with an account can see shocking or disturbing content and then have to search the information or support section for the report button. Most of the services quickly remove content or at least block it for German users whenever jugendschutz.net reported it. However, when it came to reports by users, tests revealed poor removal rates.

Easy to use advice and support systems are the key cornerstones of a concept to enable children and young people to experience the internet free of troubles. These have to make sure that young users receive quick support from counseling centers whenever Islamists approach them or they become aware of Islamist recruitment attempts. Except for Telegram, all platforms checked provided sections with general information on safety and the protection of privacy. However, especially those services that are the platforms of choice for Islamists should provide help and information focusing on specific topics. Concerning the huge amount of posts on social media, the use of technical tools to recognize extremist content becomes more and more important.

*Need for better advice and support systems for young people.*



In 2017, Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube have joined efforts and have since developed strategies within the 'Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism' to substantially disrupt terrorists' ability to promote terrorist content using their platforms. There already are intelligent systems to identify images and texts reliably. These also have to be used to protect children and young people from Islamist propaganda and recruitment attempts by Jihadist groups.

## Figures of Islamism online

Social media services are key when it comes to disseminating Islamist propaganda.

19,200 internet destinations checked, almost all hosted on servers abroad, 99 % on social media.

Number of infringements and cases:

INFRINGEMENTS:

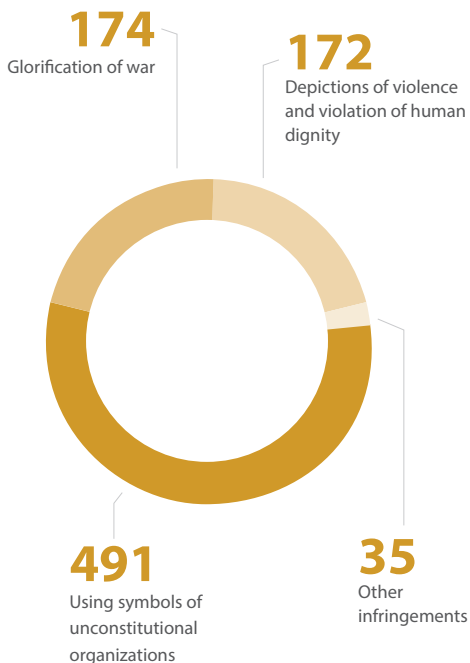
**872**

CASES:

**649**

More than 85 % of the infringements could be found on YouTube, Instagram, Telegram and Facebook.

Illegal content is predominant:



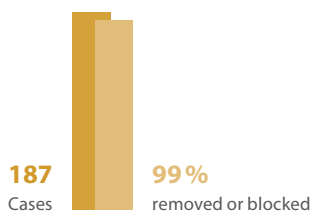
**Direct contact with providers  
most effective**

In **82 %**  
of all cases removal or  
blocking was achieved

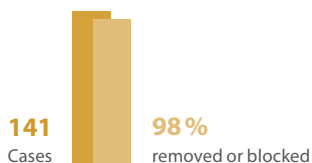
**98 %**  
of these through direct contact  
with providers

## Success in terms of global players

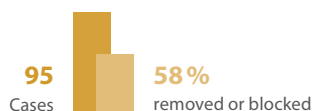
### YouTube



### Instagram



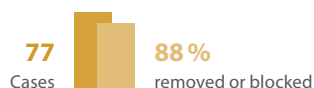
### Telegram



### Facebook



### Andere Plattformen



## **Allow children and young people to grow up well in a digital world**

jugendschutz.net is the German center at federal and state level concerning the protection of minors on the internet.

jugendschutz.net looks closely at dangers and risks in internet services specifically targeting young people and urges providers and operators to design their content in a way that allows children and young people to use the internet free of troubles.

jugendschutz.net operates a hotline accepting reports about illegal and harmful content and takes appropriate action to have this content removed as quickly as possible.

Illegal and harmful content can be reported to:

[www.hass-im-netz.info/melden](http://www.hass-im-netz.info/melden)

[hotline@jugendschutz.net](mailto:hotline@jugendschutz.net)